

Revising the ENS Curriculum for Development

By Mamadou Gueye

The Ecolé Normalé Supérieure (ENS) English department trains students for four years and awards them the degree of Teacher of English as a Foreign Language in Malian High Schools. ENS has fulfilled this role, but to some extent we wonder if it is realistic to continue teaching English as it is done now without regard to developmental issues. This article will argue that if the ENS curriculum is to serve the needs of development, it will require transformation of the ENS English curriculum.

The purpose is to develop a curriculum for the ENS English department emphasizing the use of English for developmental purposes (EDP) since the present English syllabus does not adequately meet these needs.

In spite of the similarities between ESP and EDP with regard to Needs Analysis, there is a great difference between the two approaches in terms of focus. Gueye (1990:249) attempted to show the differences when he said:

One of the main differences between ESP and EDP is that whereas ESP tries to provide the learner with skills to communicate in the work field, EDP tries to heighten learners' awareness in terms of the issues and problems related to the development of their communities as the society at large. In EDP, teaching English is not viewed as a mere tool to help learners cope with their working environment, but rather as a way of enabling them to grasp the relevant issues of their community and foster its development. In EDP, needs analysis should be supplemented with roles analysis.

However, no matter how appealing EDP seems to be, we must bear in mind the advice given by Dubain and Olshtain (1986:92) when they stated:

A good language syllabus should have a well-specified goal towards which all are moving; it should organize the material so that the learners can constantly progress in their acquisition by using generalizations as stepping stones. It seems, therefore, that objections must give meaningful direction to the organization of learning.

Actually, the mission of ENS must change because of the demands of our modern world and the unemployment problems faced by all ENS graduates. In other words, ENS English graduates can no longer find teaching positions in Malian High Schools, whereas in development there is a great need for language skills English teachers possess in abundance. As a result, we should be involved in preparing our graduates to take part in the business life of the country and the world. Many of our graduates are being asked to use their knowledge of English for much wider purposes than teaching English in high schools. For example, teachers occasionally work in NGOs, embassies, oil and mining companies; conduct population studies; translate documents;

act as interpreters or tourist guides; serve as clerks, secretaries, or administrators; and take part in literacy campaigns. As we see, in many of these cases, our graduates' use of English is a gateway to many wider responsibilities in business, economics, and administration.

If we do not take into account the requirements and needs of Malian society by equating training with employment, the ENS English graduates will just increase the number of unemployed youth roving the streets of Bamako. This would be unfair if we consider that the taxpayers' money to train our students has been wasted. We all know that our population is struggling to survive. As a result, providing our student with the appropriate training will help them contribute positively to the resolution of some of the problems facing our communities. That is why we strongly believe that Hutchinson and Waters (1987:72) are right in saying:

...Learning can, and should, be seen in the context in which it takes place. Learning is not just a mental process; it is a process of negotiation between individuals and society. Society sets the target (in the case of ESP, performance in the target situation) and the individuals must do their best to get as close to that target situation as is possible (or reject it)....In the learning process, then, there is more than just the learner to consider.

What we really need is to redefine the mission of the English department along the lines of English for Development Purposes (EDP). This will enable us to answer the following crucial questions: What is the relevance of the skills to be taught and how are these needs going to be taken care of in the process of teaching?

Gueye (1990:246–47) defined the role and mission of EDP when he stated:

Given that most third-world countries see English as a key that will give them access to science, technology and world culture, I think that, in preparing learners of English, curriculum designers should map out priority issues related to various aspects of the socio-economic and socio-cultural development of the learner's community. The English teacher should then rely on this information to help learners not only to realize the importance of the roles they will take later on in the development process of their community after formal teaching is over, but also to develop critical thinking....

In terms of methodology, EDP should be eclectic and rely on techniques used in EDP and other language-teaching theories such as Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, and so on.

Because there are some prerequisites to fulfill before applying EDP, we must not be over optimistic and think that EDP is a panacea.

Training of the Trainers

We should bear in mind that we are preparing the future of our country by training its teachers and leaders. What the teachers at ENS need is some background in computers or in political economics to catch up with developments in the modern world which are unavailable in Mali. They must know, for example, why private enterprise works or why it does not work. Private

enterprise is not finding oil, selling it, and getting rich. It is a whole system of relationships. Teachers at ENS have to understand what a corporation is and what we call a private enterprise. Besides this, they have to understand the philosophical and practical underpinnings of democracy, such as why democracy tends to be more stable than other forms of government, at least in today's world. We can ask English academics in different areas to come to ENS and give lectures on a given issue. In short, without being specialists, English teachers in an EDP class have to understand at least the organization and functioning of our modern world to help sensitize their students, the future leaders of our country.

Concrete Proposals to Revitalize and Re-adjust the ENS English Curriculum in the Light of EDP

The logical question is: What needs to be done to the traditional ENS English curriculum to make it more relevant to our development needs?

First, we must conduct a needs analysis as recommended by ESP. This needs analysis, must be supplemented with a roles analysis. According to Gueye (1990:247), "Roles Analysis" will give information about the following:

1. The learners' identity and objectives in the English class.
2. The learners' assessment of their community members' expectations from educated people in the community.
3. The learners' assessment of the socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions of their community.
4. The learners' anticipated future roles in terms of their desire or reluctance to bring about social, cultural, or economic changes in their community life.

If students have very different needs which call for interdisciplinary groups, we need to follow the approach advocated by Gibbon and Scott (1980:70):

An approach has been tried which may point to a solution to the problem of bridging the gap between general English and the study of a specialism. The first stage involves exposing the student to the language he will encounter and be expected to handle in his subsequent course of study and introducing the study skills required. The second stage launches the student into his own specialism and requires him to research, to collate information, and to produce a final written project.

It seems unrealistic to study English or American literature in the present economic climate. Instead, we have to modify part of the English curriculum, making sure that our graduates will have the same level, if not better, in English as well as an introduction to EDP. Only the courses deemed indispensable for a good level of English will be maintained. That is why, in the case of ENS, we would advise leaving intact the first year English curriculum which consists of reinforcing the students' basic skills in speaking, listening, writing, and reading along with grammar, translation, composition, and phonetics.

In the second, third, and fourth year, we must also reduce the number of hours in methodology, phonetics, linguistics, and eliminate subjects related to such topics as medieval English, religion in America, etc. Teachers must determine which aspects are relevant to an EDP course in the syllabus.

Important issues related to education, health, environmental education, and agriculture must be integrated in our conversation courses in the first and second year, with occasional participation of English-speaking guest speakers.

It is only in the second and third year that we introduce a modular scheme in which, for example, priority issues related to economics and management, democracy and development are addressed in the form of lectures by relevant academics. We must teach what development or economics is all about in relation to our African society, and look at its advantages and disadvantages for our communities. We must explain the economic underpinnings of politics or the political underpinnings of economics, because it would be difficult to separate economics from political economy.

In the fourth year, students are encouraged to have field visits at the UNDP, the World Bank, USAID, CARE Mali, Peace Corps, and some NGOs to be familiar with the functioning of these organizations and services in Bamako.

Students must be taught how to type and to use computers. Gueye (1989:70– 79) stated:

...I think that it is still worth trying to use microcomputers in TEFL in a developing country. In language learning tasks, they can help students improve their reading and writing skills. In the future, with the advent of new technologies, computers will help develop listening and speaking skills as well.

Computers skills are necessary as computer literacy is required by employers.

We are quite aware of the financial problems arising from purchasing and maintaining computers, but sacrifices should be made. For example, to get the necessary funding, our students in the English department can give theatrical performances or organize concerts with local or international artists. We may also set up a Computer Literacy Fund and invite people to give donations. Steps must also be taken to ask some big computer companies to help.

In conclusion, the vicious circle of unemployed graduates complaining that they have no jobs and deprived populations complaining that they lack intellectuals to help them ensure their survival must be broken. In other words, EDP must help to bridge the gap between a desperate youth struggling to find jobs and a hopeless population in dire need of educated leaders who care for their needs.

All that has been said about ENS or Mali is applicable, to some degree, to any school or university in Africa or in the Third World. It is unfortunate that almost all Third World countries share the sad reality of waste in human resources, and such a waste is detrimental to creativity and the good will of decision makers. Let us be more optimistic and say that positive change is

still possible, provided we have the courage to administer drastic changes in our educational systems in general, and our school curricula in particular.

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